

TESTIMONY OF THE DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

JOINT PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Leslie Hotaling, Director
Department of Public Works

Anthony A. Williams
Mayor

Friday, October 5, 2001



Councilmembers Patterson, Allen, Schwartz, Orange, Graham and Catania:

My name is Leslie Hotaling, Director of the District Department of Public Works. Thank you for including DPW in these discussions regarding our city's preparedness to face crisis and cope with emergencies.

Normally, the Department of Public Works is charged with routine parking enforcement and keeping streets and neighborhoods clean by providing scheduled sanitation services. Under extraordinary circumstances, however, including those we've recently witnessed, the Department is called upon to do much more – with the tacit expectation that daily municipal services will not be disrupted.

As the events of Tuesday, September 11 unfolded, DPW sanitation crews – like so many other workers in the District – were already on the job. By the time the Pentagon was attacked in Virginia, nearly half their workday was behind them. We decided, in consultation with the Mayor's Office, that the best course of action – based on the information we had at the time – was to have our employees continue their work to the best of their abilities. We had no idea how events would unfold that day, and we were agreed that it was important to have equipment and employees deployed as ready resources to the Mayor and the city.

I am pleased to note that on that day, and every day following the hellish bombings, residential trash services and street cleaning remained on schedule. Further, as other Federal and municipal employees were released from duty on that Tuesday, our employees remained on stand-by.

As we all work to recover and reestablish a sense of normalcy, it is evident that we, like all major cities in this country, need a broader, more sophisticated preparedness plan. DPW and its Division of Transportation (DDOT) is now working in cooperation with the Emergency Management Agency (EMA), and other agencies to craft a comprehensive strategy for municipal response to terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other emergencies. As EMA spearheads the District's Domestic Preparedness (Terrorism) Plan, DPW will be at the table helping to define its own role – including debris removal, emergency vehicle and equipment availability, and restoration of fuel and energy supplies to District agencies and residents.

When hurricanes Andrew and David hit the United States in the 1990s, the importance of debris removal in the overall government response was made clear. Immediately following those natural disasters, emergency vehicles couldn't get around because streets were blocked. Tons of wreckage had to be removed to allow recovery procedures to begin. **Emergency Support Function (ESF) #3 - Public Works And Engineering** will be critical to restoring commerce and day-to-day life in the affected areas. The value of this ESF has been demonstrated repeatedly from the Northridge earthquake to the recent bombings in New York and across the river in Arlington.

As the lead agency for this portion of the District's Emergency Operations Plan, DPW will work closely with our partner agencies; the District Division of Transportation, the Office of Property Management, the DC Water and Sewer Authority, Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs; as well as our Federal allies, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy and the US Army Corp of Engineers. As a team, we will define the scope of remediation and recovery activities necessary in the immediate aftermath of an emergency event. These activities are not limited to rapid-response clearance of wreckage to facilitate rescue and debris removal from public space – in addition to our primary charter – basic sanitation services, street cleaning, fleet maintenance and towing of illegally parked or abandoned vehicles. DPW will also play an important role in **(ESF #10)** – the removal and disposal of Hazardous Materials; and **(ESF #12)** – ensuring the continuation of energy services. In tandem with the US Department of Energy, DPW's Energy Office will be instrumental in coordinating agencies and utility companies to quickly restore energy systems and fuel supplies during and following a natural disaster or an emergency event.

We've often said that DPW's greatest resources are people and trucks. We are prepared to mobilize these resources on short notice and direct them according to the city's needs. The drafting and continual refinement of the city's Emergency Operations Plan will determine the parameters of those needs. We believe; however, that part of our contingency planning must include the ability to draw a line between providing municipal services and meeting the emergency needs I've described. In other words, within approximately 12 hours of a significant event, DPW will need the resources

and authority to activate and deploy outside resources, so that they may work to sustain our core services to the community.

In closing, DPW has focused its efforts over the last year on improving our level of professionalism and scheduled services. Our workforce is better equipped and better trained than it has been during any of my 24 years with the District government. Let me assure the Council, the residents of our city and our neighboring jurisdictions that DPW stands ready, willing and able to position ourselves to do the heavy lifting should – God forbid - the need ever arise.

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